



Preparing to Return to In-person Rehearsals

As we have surpassed one-year since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, we are all wondering when we might be able to safely sing together again. The international community of Sweet Adelines has shown its creativity, resiliency, and care for one another this past year. Many choruses and/or regions find themselves prepared to take the first steps to rehearse in person and are ready to do so as safely and responsibly as possible.

Early in the pandemic (March 2020), clusters of COVID-19 infections occurred in groups participating in choir rehearsals in both the USA and Europe. Over a year later, research on best practices is ongoing, and many of our regions are in various levels and stages of phased reopening or beginning plans of potential reopening. **When determining how to proceed, local and government guidance should take priority over any guidance from your chorus or quartet.** It may be some time before singing together in person is considered safe for everyone, and it is important to note that there is not a single solution for each region, chorus, quartet or individual.

What is COVID-19 and what are the risks?

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a coronavirus.

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. While each of these serious health problems increases the risk of severe COVID-19 symptoms, people who have several of these underlying health problems are at even higher risk.

Being well informed about how the COVID-19 virus spreads is helpful in preventing and slowing down the transmission of the virus. The COVID-19 virus spreads primarily through droplets or aerosols of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can be spread by people who are not experiencing symptoms. Protect yourself and others from infection by washing your hands or using an alcohol based rub frequently and not touching your face. **It is important to note that singing is considered a high-risk activity for the spread of COVID-19.**

A number of performing arts organizations have joined forces and commissioned a study on the effects of COVID-19 on the return to the rehearsal hall. It is important to understand what risks exist in performing arts classrooms and performance venues. Specifically, the study is examining aerosol rates produced by wind instrumentalists, vocalists, and even actors, and how quickly those aerosol rates accumulate in a space.

<https://www.nfhs.org/articles/unprecedented-international-coalition-led-by-performing-arts-organizations-to-commission-covid-19-study/>

BACK TO REHEARSAL

The outline below will help to identify risks associated with gathering to sing and considerations for fellow singers.

RISK EVALUATION

Every chorus has its own set of unique circumstances, including chorus size, geographical location, rehearsal venue characteristics, member demographics, and underlying health conditions. Analyzing these factors and undertaking a detailed risk assessment will enable chorus leaders to develop a plan for how future rehearsals may be managed.

There are many tools available to assist with risk assessment and mitigations.

The World Health Organization has a specific tool designed for risk assessment of group gatherings; it is not singing specific, but there is a version of the tool for religious gatherings, whose characteristics closely mimic those of singing activities.

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/how-to-use-who-risk-assessment-and-mitigation-checklist-for-mass-gatherings-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

DEVELOPING COVID-19 PROTOCOLS FOR YOUR CHORUS OR QUARTET GATHERING

Consider assembling a focus group of members to establish protocols and disseminate them to the group. This group may also meet from time to time to reassess protocols. We recommend that a single individual be designated as the person who holds the personal and confidential information for each member regarding increased risk or exposure. Each member will need to feel comfortable with that designee.

Other considerations when developing your plan are below:

- Rehearsals may begin in phases, identify groups by sections or groups of 10, 20 or more depending on your rehearsal location, ventilation, and capacity.
- Be sure members are staying in one spot during rehearsal to limit exposure.
- Try to limit bathroom use or create a sign-in/out sheet for contact tracing.
- Provide a hand-washing and sanitizing station at the point of entry.
- Using a no-contact thermometer, check your temperature and screen singers for symptoms.
- Have members fill out a Health Questionnaire prior to rehearsal.
- Wear masks at all times.
- Have disposable masks available.
- Be flexible with the attendance policy so that members feel comfortable staying home if they are exhibiting symptoms or have had direct exposure to someone with COVID-19.
- Be responsible. If you are sick or experiencing any possible COVID-related symptoms, STAY HOME.
- Consider a virtual option for those unable or uncomfortable with attending in person.

- Do NOT share music, pens, pencils, drinking fountains, etc.
- Directors are recommended to wear a mask and to stand as far from the chorus as possible.
- Maintain social distancing.

REHEARSAL SPACE

Prior to returning to your rehearsal space, contact the facility to discuss their requirements, protocols, and share your safety protocols with them.

- Determine who cleans and prepares the space for rehearsal and between rehearsals.
- Clearly specify what cleaning and sanitizing encompasses.
- Review ventilation and airflow in the rehearsal space and consider any changes that might need to be made.
- Consider a site visit with the facility to review the space.
- Determine lines of communication between the facility and the chorus if an individual in either entity should test positive for COVID-19 to enable appropriate contact tracing.

As with any other chorus or quartet activity, it is a shared responsibility to conduct the safest gathering possible. The chorus may want to create a sanitizing team or assign specific duties to singers to sanitize the space prior to and after rehearsal.

Other considerations for your rehearsal space may include a separate entrance and exit, signage for social distancing reminders, and assigned areas for personal items.

REHEARSAL PROTOCOL

All rehearsal plans should clearly communicate each singer's individual responsibility to ensure rehearsals are conducted safely. Each person is coping with this pandemic in the best way that they can and eliminating questions with a comprehensive and up-to-date plan will encourage a harmonious and safe return to rehearsal.

The protocols for each rehearsal should begin before singers have entered the rehearsal space. The chorus or quartet may have an individual in place to remind those entering of the protocols, screening singers with a temperature check, and reminding them of the health questionnaire prior to entering the rehearsal space. Singers should limit the number of personal items brought to rehearsal and clearly label any beverage, food, medication, etc., placing them in the area assigned to them.

Social distancing and good hygiene should be encouraged and practiced by all. This includes a hand-washing and/or hand sanitizing station. A mask may be worn for rehearsal or until a singer reaches their assigned area.

Because indoor ventilation can be inadequate for COVID safety protocols, the risk for transmission is increased. Choruses and quartets may consider outdoor or drive-in rehearsals when possible.

VIRTUAL ACCESS

Each individual will mitigate risks in the best way possible and there will be many that may not be ready to attend in-person rehearsals for various reasons. Each chorus or quartet may consider virtual access to rehearsals, virtual breakouts, and virtual education for those not in attendance. Another resource to take advantage of is virtual coaching and virtual visits by international and/or regional faculty. It is important to recognize that we are all coping with this pandemic in the way that works best for each individual; understanding and flexibility will promote a happy, sustainable chorus.

CONTACT TRACING AND PRIVACY

Many countries have laws regarding medical privacy that must be followed. If a singer has a potential exposure to COVID-19, the exposure must be communicated quickly and efficiently while protecting the individual's privacy. It is important to establish protocols to determine who has been in contact with an individual that has been exposed to COVID-19.

These protocols may include assigning singers to specific groups, sign-in/out sheets for restroom usage that include the time, meticulous attendance, etc. Assigning one specific person per chorus who collects this information and is the first contact for an individual exposed, will help to ensure consistent practices and communication. This person should be made aware of local and government guidelines regarding medical privacy rights and should be an individual trusted by the chorus.

HAVE A PLAN

Despite best efforts, it is possible that your chorus or quartet may have someone who is exposed to COVID-19. Prior to the first rehearsal, a plan should be in place that outlines the procedure to handle potential exposure. This plan should include the following:

- Clearly define and communicate what entails exposure. For the most current definition, refer to guidance from the WHO, CDC, or your local health organization.
- Identify the person in the chorus who an exposed or COVID-positive individual should alert and who will then alert the chorus as needed for safety and respecting privacy.
- Regularly make sure contact and emergency contact information are up to date for all members.
- Create a questionnaire to get pertinent details regarding exposure, date of positive test, names of people the individual recalls potentially exposing, etc.
- Establish a communication plan for those who have been exposed.
- Clean and disinfect the facility.
- Communicate the need for quarantine of individuals, chorus, or quartet.
- Make a plan to temporarily switch to virtual rehearsals if necessary.

COMMUNICATION

The key to a successful return to rehearsal will depend greatly on clear communication provided to each member of the chorus. The plan for return to rehearsal, rehearsal protocols, and information on chorus or quartet contacts, etc. should be readily available and accessible to all members. Members should be reminded of guidelines and procedures prior to each rehearsal and any updates should be communicated immediately.

The chorus should designate a contact person that singers are comfortable with for any questions or concerns regarding protocols. As with any change, there may be concerns or disagreements and the chorus should address them with an open mind. Each member will have a responsibility to follow chorus protocols.

For any potential conflict regarding chorus protocols, singers may reach out to the contact of the chorus to express their concerns. If they are not able to be resolved at the chorus level, each region will have a designated Regional Rehearsal Liaison to assist. If at any point the issue is not resolved, the singer, chorus, quartet or Regional Rehearsal Guide may reach out to the Membership Department at International Headquarters at member@sweetadelines.com.